



Dana E. Blackwell
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

COMMISSIONERS:
CAROL O. BIONDI
PATRICIA CURRY
HON. JOYCE FAHEY
ANN E. FRANZEN
SUSAN F. FRIEDMAN
HELEN A. KLEINBERG, CHAIR
DAISY MA
DR. LA-DORIS MCCLANEY
REV. CECIL L. MURRAY
WENDY L. RAMALLO, ESQ.
SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS
STACEY F. WINKLER

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **July 17, 2006**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Patricia Curry
Helen A. Kleinberg
Hon. Joyce Fahey
Ann E. Franzen
Susan F. Friedman
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Wendy L. Ramallo
Sandra Rudnick
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette F. Williams
Stacey F. Winkler

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Daisy Ma

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the July 17, 2006, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the June 19, 2006, general meeting were unanimously approved. Chair Kleinberg commended recorder Evelyn Hughes for capturing a very complicated and emotional agenda.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Dr. David Sanders has been appointed executive vice president of systems improvement at Casey Family Programs in Seattle, and will be stepping down as director of the Department of Children and Family Services at the end of this month. Chair Kleinberg congratulated Joan Smith on her appointment as interim director of the department.
- Chair Kleinberg introduced Los Angeles County's new Executive Officer, Sachi Hamai, who commented on the critical mission of providing high-quality support services to the county's commissions. She is looking forward to working with the Commission on filling its executive director position.
- Chair Kleinberg, Vice Chair Rudnick, and Commissioners Williams, Friedman, Ma, and Winkler, along with executive director Dana Blackwell, met on June 19 with members of the DCFS leadership team, County Counsel, and Mike Gennaco of the Office of Independent Review (OIR) to discuss the Sarah C. case. Commissioner Friedman has agreed to take the lead on child fatalities, and she and Ms. Blackwell met with County Counsel, Joan Smith, and Cassandra Turner to talk about how the Commission will participate in death reviews. Commissioner Friedman will report back to the Commission on this topic in August.
- The department has followed up satisfactorily with Mrs. Shirley Andy, the kinship care provider who spoke of her difficulties at the Commission's June 19 meeting.
- Materials in Commission packets address issues raised previously about wraparound services. If further questions exist, they can be answered at a future meeting.
- Commissioner Fahey has again agreed to oversee the Commission's election process. Following her contacting Commissioners by phone, nominations will take place at the September 5 meeting. The election will occur on September 18.
- The Commission's annual retreat is scheduled for October 16, and volunteers are sought for the planning committee; please contact Elizabeth Hinton in the office.
- At the August 7 meeting, Ms. Blackwell will provide a status report on all committee meetings she has been attending on behalf of the Commission. Chair Kleinberg would like to continue representation at these committees, and encouraged Commissioners to consider contributing their time. She further asked Commissioners who sit on other committees or represent the Commission in the community to prepare a report on the status of those groups.
- The personnel committee will meet on Wednesday, July 19, with the Executive Office's Joanne Sturges and Khanh Nguyen to discuss the job description for the Commission's executive director position and to begin the recruitment process.

- The Department of Mental Health has invited the Commission to participate on the Project ABC governance board, formed to oversee the comprehensive service system for children birth to age five—funded by a six-year grant from the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration—being established in SPA 4. The governance board’s first meeting is July 19, and Chair Kleinberg will report further at the Commission’s August 7 meeting.
- Chair Kleinberg thanked Dr. Sanders for his work as department director, characterizing his three-plus years as “an extraordinary time for all of us.” From a sprawling bureaucracy, dysfunctional despite good intentions, he has put together a system that almost everyone is pleased with, all the while remaining consistently accessible and inclusive. Though incremental steps are still being made, his legacy will be that “he showed us it could be done.” The Commission’s role is now to see that improvements for children and families continue, and that the department under Ms. Smith continues to progress on the same path. As with Ms. Blackwell’s move to Supervisor Burke’s office, it is fortunate for the county that Dr. Sanders’ position with Casey Family Programs will allow for a continued relationship with the Commission and its concerns.

On behalf of the Commission, Chair Kleinberg presented a plaque and a framed children’s painting to Dr. Sanders in appreciation of his extraordinary service to the children and families of Los Angeles County. The plaque extolled his exemplary leadership qualities in decreasing the number of children removed from their homes, increasing their safety, and clarifying the three key departmental goals of prevention, reunification, and permanency, in the process earning the respect of the community and child welfare professionals alike.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT

- Dr. Sanders praised the advocacy of the community and the Commission, particularly thanking Vice Chair Sorkin, Commissioner Williams, and Chair Kleinberg, all of whom served as chair of the Commission during his tenure. The challenge of leadership in a bureaucracy, he said, is to push it further than it believes it can go. The Commission’s role is to keep the department focused on the children and families and to require excellence, which it has done without fail. He looks forward to continuing to provide support for the department’s moving beyond expectations.
- Dr. Sanders reviewed the summary of strategy implementation and case counts by regional office as of June 30, thanking Helen Berberian for gathering the data into an easy-to-understand format. Point of engagement is rolled out in nearly all offices, and concurrent planning, the final initiative, is expected to be fully implemented by the end of fiscal year 2006–2007. Case count trends have moved in the right direction over the past two years, with the numbers of children in long-term foster care decreasing and those in family reunification and family maintenance on the rise.
- In the resolution of the Katie A. case, DCFS and the Department of Mental Health developed a joint plan that would ensure that every child in the child welfare system is screened for mental health issues and assessed if necessary, and that mental health

treatment reshapes and expands service delivery to include intensive in-home services, wraparound, therapeutic foster care, and other services. The plaintiffs in the case believe this plan is inadequate, and asked that the court reject it and order the Katie A. panel to develop an alternate plan, which Los Angeles County would implement. The court has rejected this request, indicating that the joint departmental plan—along with some enhancements the court is contemplating, including a set of exit criteria—should be implemented. The Katie A. panel will continue its involvement for another 18 months, pending the development of these criteria, but the case has reached a resolution for now. Further developments will appear on the Commission agenda as needed.

CROSSOVER YOUTH—START PROGRAM EVALUATION

The 300/600 Committee was created by the Board of Supervisors ten years ago in response to a growing awareness that youth in group homes and foster care were growing up, moving into the probation system, and becoming “crossover youth.” The committee created the START (Start Taking Action Responsibly Today) unit, a multidisciplinary team of representatives from DMH, DCFS, Probation, and education that became the case-carrying entity for youth exhibiting delinquency behavior, surrounding them with services. The unit worked well for several years, until a change in DCFS leadership altered the funding source (putting DMH in the lead), modified the criteria for participation, and established a dual-worker situation whereby case-carrying responsibilities were split between a regular CSW and a START worker, creating confusion. With the arrival of Dr. Sanders, Commissioners Curry and Biondi began a reorganization to return the program to working effectively.

Dr. Denise Herz from the California State University Los Angeles School of Criminal Justice and Criminalistics presented a preliminary evaluation of the START unit. Because the timeframe of the research was constrained by the availability of files, it was done during the program’s dysfunctional stage, yet still offers positive and interesting results.

Data collection began in August 2005, and cases were included if the youth had been served by any of the four START locations between April 1 and December 31, 2004, and had completed their START participation by the end of 2004. A total of 111 cases met these criteria. The youth were 32 percent female, had an average age of just over 15 years, and were 63 percent African-American, 31 percent Latino, and 6 percent Caucasian or Native American.

- The youths’ dependency case characteristics most often included neglect (over 90 percent) and abuse. Of the youths’ mothers, one-third had a known criminal history, and two-thirds had a history of substance abuse.
- In terms of interaction with their immediate family, 40 percent of the youth had contact and a third of the families offered support (complying with court orders, etc.), but only 15 percent could offer a stable environment for the youth. Extended family took

on more of that role, but only for less than half the youth involved. Twenty percent had no contact at all with their immediate family.

- Of the youth, 89 percent had been arrested, 69 percent were on probation at their entry into START, and 34 percent were in a 241.1 study.
- Most youth were enrolled in school, but few were educationally stable. In treatment, only 15 percent were stable, and 20 percent had experienced treatment changes as a result of problem behavior. Sixty percent were unstable in placement, and 80 percent had experienced placement changes as a result of problem behavior.
- Three-quarters of the youth were using or abusing substances, primarily alcohol and marijuana. Because substance use was not the focus of the study, the 7 percent figure for use of cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamines is considered an underestimate.
- Mental health disorders included a high instance of oppositional defiance disorder (46 percent) and depression (42 percent), and nearly two-thirds of the youth were diagnosed with two or more conditions—usually behavioral health issues combined with depression. ADHD, less than 10 percent of the diagnoses, requires additional testing, and Dr. Herz did not know if that had been done. Organic brain diagnoses (bipolar disorder and others) were a much smaller category. Dr. Herz raised the underlying concerns of funding streams driving how youth are assessed and labeled, a discussion not limited to the START program.
- Forty-two percent of the youth had been or were being prescribed psychotropic medications, and 34 percent had refused to take them. Youth with significant mental health problems can be reluctant to take medication because of the side effects, finding that illicit substances work better for them. Often, too, drugs become less effective over time, or youth feel that the system is drugging them simply to keep them docile.
- The average time in START was just shy of a year, and 37 percent of youth successfully completed the program. Especially because of the high-risk nature of these youth, and because START is a completely voluntary program—no one requires them to participate—many consider this result positive. Despite the lack of aftercare, 71 percent were still doing reasonably well following their departure. Of those who left because of noncompliance, about half are doing poorly (and were also doing poorly in the program).
- For those successfully completing START, subsequent placements in group homes drop dramatically. Treatment for alcohol and drug problems increases, stability in school, treatment, and placement soars, and the average number of subsequent arrests decreases. In general, risks diminish and strengths grow.

Along with many other recommendations, the evaluation suggests deciding what START should be—a prevention program for youth just beginning problem behavior, or, as it functions now, an intervention program that seeks to prevent further escalation into the

delinquency system. If it is truly a prevention program, its selection criteria, selection process, and services need substantial revising. If it is an intervention program, then it should be connected to the 241.1 process and shed its voluntary nature, having the delinquency court order START services for youth who are dually supervised.

PROBATION DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

Commissioner Biondi introduced Chief Probation Officer Robert Taylor, who has held the position for three months, following the untimely death of Paul Higa. Mr. Taylor expressed his pleasure at appearing before the Commission, saying that collaboration is needed to repair the brokenness of the entire criminal justice system.

According to a recent court mandate stemming from a 2003 lawsuit filed by the Prison Law Office, California must restructure its incarceration facilities for juvenile offenders into smaller, more modern lockups, cutting the number of wards allowed in a housing unit from 70 to 38 and requiring more treatment programs and training. The Department of Juvenile Justice (formerly the California Youth Authority) will look to local counties for those placements, even though minors in juvenile halls who are sentenced to DJJ facilities are often turned away because of mental health, drug, and other issues.

In the adult system, California leads the nation in prison inmates and in their recidivism rate (76 percent), with more drug offenders than ever. The state spends more on prisons than on education, and the public continues to support tough sentencing laws. With its 20,000 inmates, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department had severe overcrowding issues, even though inmates typically serve only 10 percent of their time. About 70,000 adults are on probation in the county.

As a county youth prison system, Los Angeles County's is the largest in the nation; only the states of Texas and Florida have more youth in custody. About 20,000 minors are on probation, about 4,000 of whom are in custody in the halls and camps. The recidivism rate is 31 percent (for new offenses, not for probation violations), and only 21 percent of adult offenders were also involved in the county's juvenile system. (Mr. Taylor did not know what percentage that was of the juvenile system's population.) Between 50 and 70 percent of the youth currently incarcerated are there for probation violations.

Within the juvenile section of the Probation Department, current practices include structured decision-making assessments and referral measures, a graduated system of sanctions and interventions, drug treatment, and mental health, life skills, and vocational services. A barber college offers a training program, for instance, and at Camp Paige, an agreement with the Forestry Service gives youth experience in creating fire trails and planting trees. Once youth leave the juvenile justice system, however, their criminal records almost always prevent them from being hired—although Commissioner Biondi noted that juveniles are not convicted as felons. Commissioner Friedman noted that Texas's recidivism rate is only 16 percent because of their plethora of skills programs, and she asked if Mr. Taylor could make some phone calls to the heads of the forestry and barber programs, for example, requesting that they test and hire these youth. He said he would be doing that, but that a legislative piece needs to be in place as well.

External influences on the department include Federal, state, and court decisions and various audits. Mr. Taylor's goal is to restore the department's favorable reputation and move it to a position of leadership in the probation field. To accomplish this, internal needs include training, human resources, internal controls and investigations, investments in infrastructure, revised organizational practices to develop cross-relationships and eliminate a siloed system, and a shift to evidence-based practices.

Mr. Taylor welcomes the blueprints for change suggested by recent audits, as the department has been plagued by years of neglect and must refocus and recommit to its primary responsibility as a community corrections agency. It will request an extension from the Department of Justice to complete four tasks involving mental health education and facility safety issues. Of the issues raised in the Child Welfare League of America audit, approximately 32 are completed, and management consultants have been hired who will assist the Auditor-Controller's office with those remaining. Staff from the Auditor-Controller's office and the Sheriff's Department have also been brought on board.

What began as a redesign of the camp system is taking on a broader approach, with a focus on treatment, accountability, rehabilitation, and transition. Various therapy models are being used, including the social learning model, which addresses social skills, violence prevention, family engagement, and a change in thinking patterns to bring about social competency. About 30 percent of probation youth need mental health care, and 25 to 30 percent have serious educational needs, either performing considerably below grade level or requiring special education services. (Even when achievement levels are raised by a grade or two, when youth leave they are often placed in continuation schools, a problematic environment.) Legally, anyone under 18 is a minor and may come under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court; however, the crime-prone age group is 13 to 26, and perhaps the legal authority to serve those youth should be reviewed, since there is the greatest opportunity for success with this group. One barrier to service is trying to assist them in a large general population.

Mr. Taylor has submitted an 'unmet needs' budget to the Board of Supervisors of \$164 million, which he considers comprehensive but not complete; the department's real need is for about \$400 million. Of the request, security is the largest part at \$114 million, with juvenile institutions and support at \$23 million and a management restructure at \$26 million. A one-time cost of \$109 million is also included, plus \$55 million in staffing costs.

Commissioner Biondi questioned the \$114 priority spending that does not seem to relate to any audit requirements: for costly prison hardware rather than rehabilitation or services. A matrix showing how budget items relate to the audits is included in the budget, and Mr. Taylor will provide copies. Commissioner Curry praised Mr. Taylor's overall vision—preventing children from jumping to probation from foster care, stopping at the front end the cycle that launches them into the adult justice system and spurs the building of yet more jails—yet also queried the budget's \$146 million that includes no services. Where is the plan to achieve this overall vision? Will people be pulled from other agencies? How will they be trained? Three months ago, for example, she met with Probation

to plan for youth from MacLaren Children's Center, but the plan has not yet been drafted. She would also like to see a plan for working with the new Title IV-E waiver.

A look at the big picture is good, Commissioner Curry agreed, but specifics are important. How will the Probation Department access Mental Health Services Act or independent living program funds? How many wraparound slots exist, or family systems therapy slots? If Probation personnel can't be persuaded to come to START meetings, how can AB 129 services be integrated with DCFS? Probation needs to be an intimate partner.

According to Mr. Taylor, a community corrections conference is being planned for October or November to ask stakeholders and services providers to help design an effective system. The budget request does not detail all the programs and efforts that exist, and an intensive look at the system as a whole is needed to discover the practices that work best so they may be retained. The waiver fits with some departmental programs, especially as redesigned, and he is working with DCFS on a document that addresses many topics discussed today, which will be submitted by the end of this week. Chair Kleinberg asked for a copy to be provided to the Commission.

Education tends to be the biggest factor affecting recidivism in the camps, yet Carrie Watson from the Education Coordination Council reported that Probation was not permitting youth to attend summer school, even though group home staff would transport them, because of safety issues. Commissioner Williams suggested looking into having school districts provide on-site teachers at group homes to offer summer school courses as well as tutoring for the exit exam and the GED, since some areas are simply too dangerous for youth to travel in.

For the last ten years, Commissioner Ramallo has seen few personnel in Probation who are well versed in anything but corrections—almost none have any knowledge or expertise about the 24,000 juveniles for whom they are responsible. How can the department achieve Mr. Taylor's vision if it stays on that road? It was her understanding that the department was working with the county's Human Resources office on revised job descriptions, which she sees as critical to avoiding a continuing disaster. Mr. Taylor said that some changes in that regard are tied to the budget and some to the reorganization. The operations chief and administrative chief's job descriptions are complete, but those positions cannot be filled until the budget is approved. He has already divided responsibilities for the adult and juvenile sections.

Chair Kleinberg asked Mr. Taylor if he would report again to the Commission after another three months, and told him the Commission stands ready to help in his focus on juveniles, so many of whom have had no chance for a normal life at all. The Commission looks forward to continuing to work with him.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED